DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 728 FL 026 530

AUTHOR Short, Deborah J.
TITLE The ESL Standards: Bridging the Academic Gap for English Language Learners. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-FL-00-13
PUB DATE 2000-12-00
NOTE 4p.
CONTRACT ED-99-CO-0008
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016. For full text: http://www.cal.org/ericcll/DIGEST.
PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; *Access to Education; *Educational Objectives; *English (Second Language); Equal Education; Futures (of Society); Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Content Area Teaching; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the rationale behind and development of the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) standards. To ensure that English language learners (ELLs) would have access to effective educational programs and the opportunity to reach high standards, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) decided to pursue the development of the ESL standards. A conceptual framework that articulated TESOL's vision of effective education for ELLs was drafted. The framework calls on all educational personnel to assume responsibility for ELLs and demands that schools provide these students with access to all services, such as gifted and talented courses. The framework also lists principles of second language acquisition and explains the benefits of bilingualism and the contribution of native language proficiency to the development of English. Nine ESL content standards are organized under three educational goals. They state what students should know and be able to do as a result of ESL instruction and set goals for students' social and academic language development and sociocultural competence. The ESL standards are listed in the digest. Discussion highlights what the standards mean for educators, implementation of the ESL Standards, and future directions. (VWL)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ERIC DIGEST

EDO-FL-0013 DECEMBER 2000

The ESL Standards
Bridging the Academic Gap for English Language Learners

DEBORAH J. SHORT

ED 447 728

FL 026 530

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC DIGEST EDO-FL-0013 DECEMBER 2000

The ESL Standards
Bridging the Academic Gap for English Language Learners

DEBORAH J. SHORT

In the early 1990s, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and other legislation that promoted high academic expectations for all students encouraged a movement among professional education associations to develop standards for specific academic content areas. The intent was for these national standards to serve as guidelines for state and local curriculum and assessment design and for the professional development of teachers.

During this same period, the number of pre-K–12 students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds enrolled in U.S. schools grew at nearly 10 times the rate of native-English-speaking students. However, English as a second language (ESL) was not a federally designated content area for standards development. Instead, federal officials indicated that other content areas, particularly English language arts, should address the needs of English language learners (ELLs). Their rationale was that the content area standards were intended "for all students." Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) then established a task force to monitor the reform efforts and encourage professional groups working on content area standards to accommodate ELLs. It became evident, however, that ELLs' language acquisition and academic needs were not being reflected in the content standards' drafts. For example, ELLs were not among the students described in vignettes or learning scenarios, nor were teachers offered guidance on how to teach a content standard to students with limited proficiency in English.

To ensure that ELLs would have access to effective educational programs and the opportunity to reach high standards, the task force produced *The Access Brochure* (TESOL, 1993), an advocacy tool to help programs and schools examine and adjust the opportunities they provide for ELLs to learn to high standards. TESOL then decided to pursue the development of standards for English as a second language. A second task force was formed, and a conceptual framework that articulated TESOL's vision of effective education for ELLs was drafted. The framework calls on all educational personnel to assume responsibility for ELLs and demands that schools provide these students with access to all services, such as gifted and talented courses. The framework also lists principles of second language acquisition and explains the benefits of bilingualism and the contribution of native language proficiency to the development of English (TESOL, 1996).

ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students

The ESL Standards and Assessment Project began officially in 1995 with a grass-roots effort involving 18 writing teams from across the United States, some representing their state, others representing an affiliate of TESOL or NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education). For models, TESOL examined content-area standards being developed in the United States and the Australian ESL bandscales and planned standards for ESL that would accommodate the multiple program models (e.g., self-contained ESL, sheltered instruction, transitional bilingual education) used to educate ELLs in the United States.

ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students (TESOL, 1997) was written and released for review and comment in 1996; feedback was solicited from educators who had experience working with linguistically and culturally diverse students and from representatives of other content areas that were developing standards. The draft was revised and published by TESOL in 1997.

Nine ESL content standards are organized under three educational goals. They state what students should know and be able to do as a result of ESL instruction and set goals for students' social and academic language development and sociocultural competence. The ESL standards, listed below, take a functional approach to language learning and use and allow for maximum flexibility in curriculum and program design.

ESL Standards

Goal 1: To use English to communicate in social settings.

Standard 1: Students will use English to participate in social interactions.

Standard 2: Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment.

Standard 3: Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

Goal 2: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas.

Standard 1: Students will use English to interact in the classroom.

Standard 2: Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.

Standard 3: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.

Goal 3: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Standard 1: Students will use appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting.

Standard 2: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting.

Standard 3: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.

What Do the ESL Standards Mean for Students and Educators?

Although the goals and standards may look intuitive, they represent a profound shift in how English must be viewed in U.S. schools: *English is no longer just a subject.* English skills must be developed through ESL, English language arts, and all other content classes so that ELLs can learn the content while they are acquiring English. The *ESL Standards* guide teachers in new approaches for ELLs.

For the first goal, ELLs must use English for social purposes. They need to chat with peers and teachers and use English for their own enjoyment—to read a magazine or watch a movie. For the second goal, ELLs need to use English to achieve academically. Once students exit bilingual or ESL programs, they find it difficult to succeed in subject area classes without knowledge of academic English. The ESL standards indicate the type of academic language proficiency that students need. The third goal emphasizes that ELLs need to be explicitly taught the social and cultural norms associated with using English, such as when to use formal or informal language, what gestures are appropriate, and when humor is acceptable. Each goal includes one standard that focuses on learning strategies to help students extend their language development once they exit a language support program.

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS • CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS • 4646 40TH ST NW • WASHINGTON DC 20016-1859 • (202) 362-0700

Each standard is explicated by descriptors and progress indicators. Descriptors are akin to curriculum objectives. Progress indicators are assessable activities that teachers can incorporate into lessons to measure student growth toward meeting a standard. Vignettes, written by practicing teachers, further illustrate the standards and represent good pedagogical practice. They call particular attention to ways that teachers can work effectively with ELLs to help them meet the standards. The vignettes depict a wide range of school environments with ESL, bilingual, or content teachers, such as self-contained ESL, sheltered content instruction, ESL classes in bilingual programs, regular grade-level classes in elementary schools, career internship classes, and more.

The standards, descriptors, progress indicators, and vignettes are arranged in grade-level clusters (Pre-K–3, 4–8, and 9–12) to connect language learning with developmental learning. They describe instruction for beginning, intermediate, and advanced students. The needs of students with limited formal schooling and learning disabilities are included as well.

The intent of the *ESL Standards* was to have individual states or districts develop curricula based on the standards and describe their own proficiency levels and benchmarks of performance. Standards implementation activities are very important, because the standards reform movement in the United States has spurred widespread, high-stakes assessment. In many states, all students must pass standardized tests in core content areas for grade-level promotion or for high school graduation, after a period of exemption has passed.

Implementing the ESL Standards

State departments of education, local school districts, and teacher education institutions have been actively implementing and disseminating the *ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students*. To inform curriculum development, assessment practice, teacher education, and classroom implementation, TESOL has developed companion products to the *ESL Standards*. *Managing the Assessment Process* (TESOL, 1998) and *Scenarios for ESL Standards-Based Assessment* (TESOL, in press-a) establish the theoretical framework for assessment and offer exemplars and assessment tools for monitoring student progress toward meeting the standards. *Training Others to Use the ESL Standards: A Professional Development Manual* (Short et al., 2000) and *Implementing the ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students Through Teacher Education* (Snow, 2000) provide training materials and practical information to enhance the professional development of preservice and inservice teachers. School leaders can increase their understanding of the ESL standards through the *School Administrator's Guide to the ESL Standards* (TESOL, in press-b). A series of classroom-focused books, *Integrating the ESL Standards into Classroom Practice* (Agor, 2000; Irujo, 2000; Samway, 2000; Smallwood, 2000), offers thematic instructional units for teachers at different grade-level clusters demonstrating how to implement the ESL standards. Finally, to help teachers explain the *ESL Standards* to parents, the *Parent Guide to the ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students* is available on the Web (www.cal.org/eslstandards/parentguide.htm).

Other implementation activities include curriculum and professional development. Many states and districts have developed or revised ESL or sheltered content curricula based on the *ESL Standards*. Professional development for educators has been offered through conference sessions, workshops, and summer academies by TESOL and NABE and state and local education agencies. An implementation database and electronic discussion list support these activities, too (see www.cal.org/eslstandards).

One of the most important accomplishments of the project has been the increased stature of ESL professionals in pre-K–12 school settings. This is a less visible achievement than the published products, but a significant one. Publication of the standards opened many doors for dialogue with educators in other content areas about how best to help ELLs achieve academically. With the *ESL Standards* in hand, pre-K–12 ESL and bilingual teachers have been able to show colleagues in other disciplines what learning a second language means and what learning content through a second language requires.

Future Directions

While great strides have been made in improving educational opportunities for ELLs in schools, there is still work to be done. There is a need for all preservice candidates in teacher training institutions—not just those in ESL or bilingual education certification programs—to become familiar with the ESL standards and assessment scenarios as part of their general education course work. These future teachers should learn about second language acquisition, ESL methods—especially for sheltered content instruction—and appropriate alternative assessments that can accommodate students' developing language proficiencies.

Language educators need to collaborate more with content-area colleagues, using the *ESL Standards* to illustrate how to build language development into content lessons. Given the high-stakes testing programs in place across the United States, it is imperative that ELLs receive the best content instruction possible while they are learning English. The *ESL Standards* can show content teachers the functional uses of language that can be developed through content topics and tasks.

In addition, more textbook publishers must incorporate the ESL standards in their materials. Similarly, test developers need to conduct linguistic reviews of their test items and identify problematic areas such as overuse of synonyms and embedded questions. Subsequent linguistic simplification of test items can lead to a more accurate demonstration of ELLs' knowledge of the content area being assessed. *Scenarios for ESL Standards-based Assessment* (TESOL, in press-a) can be instrumental in these efforts.

Finally, ESL classes need to become more rigorous. It is vital to accelerate ELLs' social and academic English language development so they can master the grade-level content knowledge that will enable them to meet high standards and succeed on state and local assessments. The *ESL Standards* and assessment scenarios can lead the way.

References

Agor, B. (Ed.). (2000). *Integrating the ESL standards into classroom practice: Grades 9–12*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Irujo, S. (Ed.). (2000). *Integrating the ESL standards into classroom practice: Grades 6–8*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Samway, K.D. (Ed.). (2000). *Integrating the ESL standards into classroom practice: Grades 3–5*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Short, D., Gómez, E., Cloud, N., Katz, A., Gottlieb, M., & Malone, M. (2000). *Training others to use the ESL standards: A professional development manual*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Smallwood, B.A. (Ed.). (2000). *Integrating the ESL standards into classroom practice: Grades pre-K–12*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Snow, M.A. (Ed.). (2000). *Implementing the ESL standards for pre-K–12 students through teacher education*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1993). *The access brochure*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1996). *Promising futures*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1997). *ESL standards for pre-K–12 students*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1998). *Managing the assessment process: A framework for measuring student attainment of the ESL standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (in press-a). *Scenarios for ESL standards-based assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (in press-b). *School administrator's guide to the ESL standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

This digest was prepared with funding from the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0008. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED, OERI, or NLE.